

Role, Duties, and Responsibilities of the Housing Specialist

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Why Do We Do This?

SAMHSA Definition of Recovery

- A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.
- Four major dimensions that support a life in Recovery:
 - Health
 - Home - A stable and safe place to live
 - Purpose
 - Community

Treatment for Homelessness

“The treatment for homelessness is housing . . . It is that simple.”

Sam Tsemberis, CEO
Pathways to Housing



Relationship Between Housing & Recovery

- Most consumers want to live in their own apartment
- Providing supportive housing to consumers increases the likelihood that they will continue receiving treatment and reduce substance use
- Housing services are an essential treatment component
- Safe affordable housing is key to recovery



Service Delivery Models/Philosophy of Providing Housing Services

- Housing First
- Consumer Choice
- Harm Reduction
- Permanent Supportive Housing



Housing First

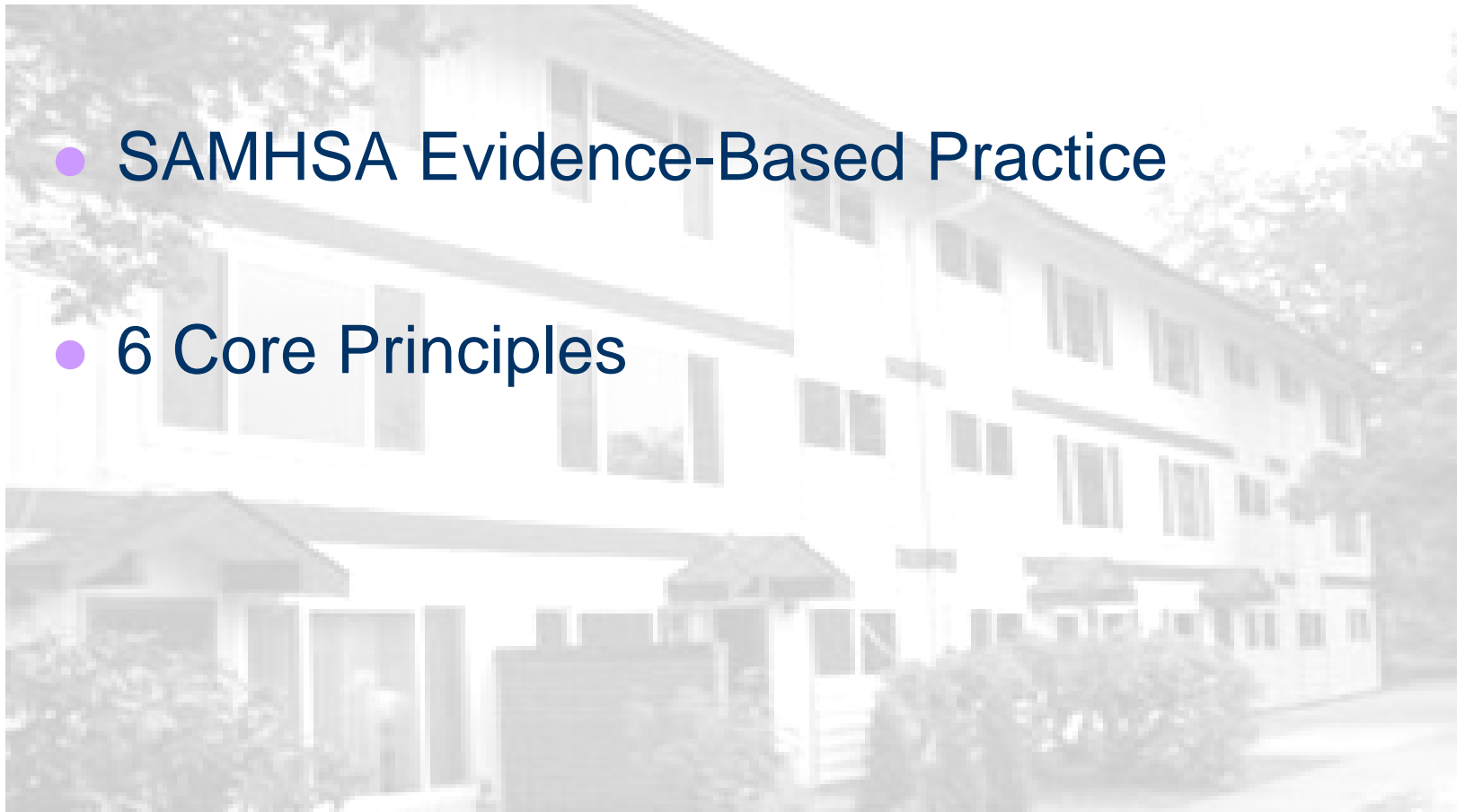
- Evidence-Based Practice that focuses on moving individuals that are homeless directly into permanent supportive housing that offers supportive services.
- Consumer choice is a key element of the approach.
- There is no requirement for enrollment or maintenance of treatment services.
- People do not have to progress through a **linear set of preparatory residential services** in order to be successful in permanent housing.

Housing First

- The premise is: Increasing housing stability is a necessary first step before addressing an individual's mental illness and substance-related disorders.
- Uses a harm reduction approach – sobriety is not a requirement for assistance with housing.
 - Focus is prevention of harm and risks associated with behavior rather than adherence to a particular treatment plan
 - Individuals are empowered to make their own choices, and regardless of choices, they are not treated adversely

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

- SAMHSA Evidence-Based Practice
- 6 Core Principles



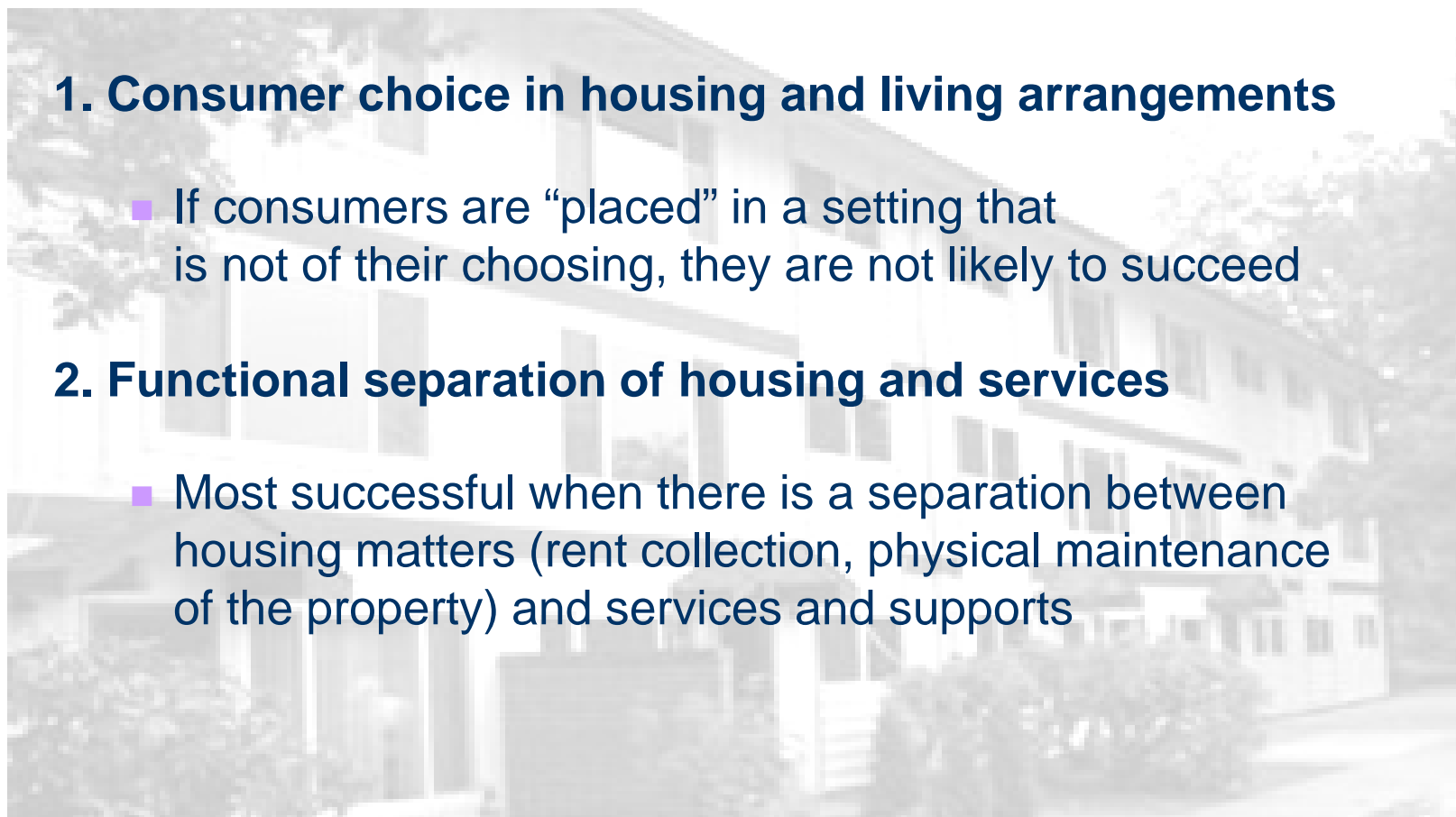
6 Core Principles of PSH

1. Consumer choice in housing and living arrangements

- If consumers are “placed” in a setting that is not of their choosing, they are not likely to succeed

2. Functional separation of housing and services

- Most successful when there is a separation between housing matters (rent collection, physical maintenance of the property) and services and supports



6 Core Principles of PSH

3. Community integration and rights of tenancy

- Housing is in regular residential neighborhoods
- Natural supports are encouraged
- Residents have full legal rights in a tenant-landlord relationship
- Tenants must abide by normal standards of behavior and conduct outlined in a lease
- Lease requirements are distinct from “program” rules
- The agreement between the tenant and landlord determines length of stay

6 Core Principles of PSH

4. Flexible, voluntary, and recovery-focused services

- Offering services is mandatory, acceptance of services by the tenant is voluntary
- Type, location, intensity, and frequency of services adjust to meet tenants' changing needs

5. Decent, safe, and affordable housing

- Tenants pay no more than 30% of their income

6 Core Principles of PSH

6. Access to housing and privacy

- Eliminate barriers and redefine readiness
- Research does not show that people with mental illnesses do better in housing if they pass a readiness screen
- Access to housing should be restricted to those elements required of any tenant, for example, ability to pay rent
- Achieving and sustaining tenancy is the primary goal and focus

Role of the Housing Specialist

- Countywide Housing Specialists
 - Receives referrals from DMH Clinics in Service Area
- Housing Coordinators/Liaisons for Agency/Clinic
 - Receives referrals from the agency case managers
- Treatment Team Member Specializing in Housing

General Categories of Duties

- Assists consumers with obtaining housing
- Assists consumers with maintaining housing
- Participates as mental health team member
- Develops housing resources in the community

Assists with Obtaining Housing

- Conducts Housing Assessment

Everyone should be **assessed individually** to match housing with need and desire

- Housing Intake and Needs Assessment
 - Housing history and evictions
 - Income eligibility
 - Housing needs, areas, safety, and space
 - Independent living skills
- VI-SPDAT – Coordinated Entry System

Coordinated Entry System

A way by which persons experiencing homelessness, and organizations providing housing, find each other in a systematic and efficient manner

- Assess
 - Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT)
- Assist
 - – with obtaining all documents required for housing
- Assign
 - – match the person to permanent housing

Assists with Obtaining Housing

- Works with consumer to develop housing plan
 - Short term vs. Long term goals
 - Identifies funding sources and resources
 - Identification of barriers
 - Assists in resolving legal history barriers (e.g. warrants, expungement)

Assists with Obtaining Housing

- Assists with compiling and assessing eligibility information in compliance with housing regulations
- Provides referrals to appropriate housing resources
- Assists with completion of applications for rental subsidies such as Homeless Section 8 and Shelter Plus Care or the Housing Assistance Program
- Assists with preparing for interviews with Housing Authority, managers and property owners (e.g. mock interviews)

Assists with Obtaining Housing

- Gathers required documents such as identification, social security card, bank statements
- Accompanies/transport consumer to all necessary related appointments as requested
- Educates consumer about available housing resources and assistance in the community
- Determines and certifies eligibility for federal, state and locally funded housing programs based on client income, assets and other financial data

Assists with Obtaining Housing

- Assists in the housing search process
- Educates consumers about tenant rights and lease responsibilities
- Advocates and negotiates for consumers with poor credit and poor housing histories (i.e. evictions or lack of housing tenancy)
- Assists with moving in

Assists with Maintaining Housing

- Ensures consumer is connected to on-going mental health services
- Advocates for consumers with landlords
- Averts possible evictions by addressing any concerns of the property owners and managers
- Liaison between landlord and consumer and mental health team
- Conducts in home visits at least quarterly

Assists with Maintaining Housing

- Helps develop connections within the community by visiting the local library/places of worship/parks
- Teaches money management/paying bills
- Teaches how to shop and cook
- Connects to volunteer service opportunities
- Supports employment/education goals



Participates as Mental Health Team Member

- Provides information, training and technical assistance to team members regarding housing resources
- Accepts housing assistance referrals from team
- Works with team to obtain information for housing applications such as documentation of disability
- Conducts home visits
- Ensures all required quarterly/annual reports are submitted

Participates as Mental Health Team Member

- Informs team of consumer programs in meeting housing goals
- Informs team of any observed, or landlord/manager reported, difficulties consumer is experiencing in the housing including:
 - Need for additional supports
 - Crisis intervention
 - Medication evaluation

Develops Resources in the Community

- Conducts outreach to property owners and managers to:
 - Develop potential housing resources
 - Provide education about mental illness to reduce stigma
 - Increase availability of housing opportunities in the fair rental market

Develops Resources in the Community

- Researches housing resources and develops community specific housing resource directory
- Liaison to Countywide Housing, Employment and Education Resource Development (CHEERD)
- Represents agency program at Service Area and Countywide housing-related meetings

Housing Specialist Presenters

Arthur Poghosyan

former Housing Specialist

Downtown Mental Health Center

Gillian Hibbert

Housing Specialist and Case Manager

San Fernando Mental Health Center, Inc

